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ABSTRACT

In the fall semester of 1981, librarians at the Sims Memorial Library of Southeastern Louisiana University (SLU) surveyed the faculty of the university to ascertain their perceptions of the status and professional contributions of librarians. Of the 264 questionnaires sent out to faculty at the four major colleges (Business, Education, Humanities, and Science and Technology), 137 were returned completed, representing a response rate of 51.9 percent. Responses were analyzed for each major college according to the rank of the respondents (i.e., professor, associate professor, assistant professor, or instructor). The questionnaire was modeled after an instrument developed at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale (SIU-C), covered such topics as the frequency of library use by faculty members, the importance of library collections for faculty research, the importance of librarians as assistants in research and teaching, whether or not librarians should conduct research, what type(s) of research librarians should conduct, and whether librarians should be granted full faculty status. It was found that a majority of faculty view librarians as professionals and that most of those surveyed felt that librarians should be granted faculty status. Data are presented in 12 tables, and a reference list and 1 25-item bibliography are attached. (JL)

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FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF LIBRARIANS:

A SURVEY

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INTRODUCTION

Librarians, as members of an academic community, are in a nebulous and, occasionally, an ill-defined position. The interests of the librarians at a particular institution are likely to be quite diverse. On a given staff there may be individuals with graduate degrees in English, history, economics, or biology, as well as professional degrees in library science. Such myriad interests and backgrounds have, in the past, been detrimental to librarians' quest for status within academe. Some writers point to an absence of an "organized body of knowledge" in negating faculty status for librarians. In fact, the "organized body of knowledge" of librarianship is precisely the organization and utilization of knowledge. In addition, many individuals further knowledge by means of research in their areas of interest.

Some state that librarians cannot be considered faculty for sociological reasons, that the idea of librarians as faculty is an "organization fiction."[1] Others recognize that faculty status entails considerable work and time (conducting research, attending professional meetings, etc.) and that effort must be expended before benefits are realized.[2] Still others believe that faculty status for librarians consists of a title and, at best, a tenuous ego boost.[3]

A great deal of the writing in opposition to faculty status for librarians comes from the pens and typewriters of librarians. Mary Biggs,

for example, states that "librarians must cease their baseless arguments for 'faculty status,' however defined."[4] Such a comment ignores the "Joint Statement on Faculty Status of College and University Librarians," prepared by the Association of College and Research Libraries, the Association of American Colleges, and the American Association of University Professors. This document states in part, "The function of the librarian as participant in the processes of teaching and research is the criterion of faculty status."[5]

In the state of Louisiana academic librarians are accorded faculty status by state statute. This statute says, "Members of the instructional staff of each college and university having the rank of instructor or higher and persons engaged in library, artistic, research and investigative positions of equal dignity, shall constitute the faculty of each college and university."[6] Southeastern Louisiana University (SLU) is one of the institutions under the governance of Louisiana's Board of Trustees for State Colleges and Universities. Because of the fact that librarians in the Board of Trustees system have faculty rank as well as status, the minimum salary of each member of the library faculty is determined by the Board's salary schedule and each member is subject to the Board's regulations regarding tenure and promotion.

In spite of these regulations, there is a perceived dichotomy on the campus of SLU between librarians and other faculty. For example, library faculty work according to a fiscal year while other faculty (excluding administrators) work according to an academic year. Also, the

library faculty are paid lower salaries than other faculty members of equivalent rank, experience, and educational attainment.

SLU SURVEY

By way of background information, SLU, located in Hammond, Louisiana, is an institution comprised primarily of undergraduate students, although eight graduate programs exist. In the fall of 1981 enrollment at SLU was approximately 9,000. In the fall semester, 1981 librarians at the Sims Memorial Library of SLU surveyed the faculty of the university to ascertain perceptions of the status and contributions of librarians. The questionnaire sent to faculty members was modeled after the instrument developed at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale (SIU-C).[7] All members of the faculty (excluding university administrators and librarians) received the questionnaire. A total of 292 questionnaires were sent out. A slight problem was incurred in that respondents from the College of Nursing stated that they were more familiar with the library at the nursing facilities in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. These respondents based their answers on their knowledge and use of that library rather than of Sims. As a result, these responses are not tabulated and the faculty of the College of Nursing is not included in the demographic data presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1

DISTRIBUTION OF FACULTY AND RESPONDENTS

College	University Faculty Number	University Faculty Percentage	Respondents Number	Respondents Percentage
Business	44	16.7	23	16.8
Education	69	26.1	21	15.3
Humanities	110	42.3	58	41.7
Science and Technology	38	14.4	33	24.1
Other	3	1.1	2	1.4
Total	264	100.0	137	99.9

Rank	Respondents Number	Respondents Percentage
Professor	45	32.8
Associate Professor	46	33.6
Assistant Professor	31	22.6
Instructor	15	10.9
Total	137	99.9

As shown in Table 1, a total of 264 questionnaires were sent to faculty members. This figure excludes those sent to the faculty of the College of Nursing, from whom no usable data was received. Of these, 137 responses were received, representing a return rate of 51.9%. The rate is considerably below the 75.7% rate received by SIU-C. Unfortunately, time and money restraints precluded a follow-up.

The highest return, in terms of number, was received from the College of Humanities, which is the largest college on the SLU campus. A proportionally high return rate was received from the College of Science and Technology and a proportionally low rate was received from the College of Education. The faculty members listed in the category "Other" do not fit into the four major colleges.

Responses were also analyzed according to the rank of the respondent, which is also presented in Table 1. The return rate for assistant professors was proportionally low. With subsequent questions the responses will be analyzed by both college and rank. The analysis of all faculty respondents will follow the analysis by rank. This provides the total number of respondents since the "Other" faculty mentioned above are not included in the breakdown by college but are included according to their rank.

TABLE 2

RESPONDENTS' USE OF LIBRARY

College	Almost Daily (%age)	Several Times a Week (%age)	Once a Week (%age)	Once a Month (%age)	Less Frequently Than Once a Month (%age)
Bus. (N=23)	4	17	30	30	17
Educ. (N=21)	0	38	29	29	5
Hum. (N=57)	2	30	33	28	7
Sci.-Tech. (N=33)	0	15	15	45	24
Rank					
Prof. (N=45)	0	22	24	40	13
Assoc. Prof. (N=46)	0	30	28	30	11
Asst. Prof. (N=31)	6	23	29	29	13
Instr. (N=15)	0	27	33	27	13
All Faculty (N=137)	1	26	28	33	12

Table 2 presents the frequency of the respondents' use of the library. Fifty-five percent of the faculty use the library once a week or more frequently; 45 percent use the library once a month or less frequently. Results of the responses to this question were fairly consistent from to rank to rank and from college to college, with one exception. The level of reported use is lower among the faculty of the College of Science and Technology. Sixty-nine percent of these faculty members use the library once a month or less frequently. Among the various ranks, professors use the library slightly less frequently than the lower ranks.

According to the results of the survey conducted at SIU-C, faculty there use the library slightly more frequently than do faculty at SLU. Sixty-three percent of the SIU-C faculty use the library once a week or more frequently, while 56 percent of the SLU faculty visit the library with the same frequency. As will be discussed later, frequency of use on the part of the faculty apparently plays a part in individual's responses to certain questions of this survey.

TABLE 3

"HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU VIEW THE LIBRARY COLLECTION AS PART OF YOUR TEACHING AND RESEARCH?"

College	Indispensable (%age)	Very Important (%age)	Important (%age)	Of Little Importance (%age)	Not Important (%age)
Bus. (N=23)	30	30	30	9	0
Educ. (N=21)	52	33	14	0	0
Hum. (N=57)	67	23	7	3	0
Sci.-Tech (N=33)	36	27	24	12	0
Rank					
Prof. (N=45)	44	29	24	2	0
Assoc. Prof. (N=46)	61	24	15	0	0
Asst. Prof. (N=31)	48	26	16	10	0
Instr. (N=15)	47	33	0	20	0
All Faculty (N=137)	51	27	17	5	0

Table 3 presents responses to the question, "How important do you view the library collection as part of your teaching and research?" The faculties of the Colleges of Humanities and of Education place more importance on the collection than do the faculties of the Colleges of Business and of Science and Technology. In fact, 67 percent of the members of the College of Humanities view the library's collection as indispensable to their work. Since some areas rely more heavily on laboratory and field research than on literature searches facilitated by the library's holdings, the results are not surprising. Also, some individuals mention that they rely more heavily on their personal collections than that of the library.

The breakdown by the rank of the respondents displays a considerable degree of consistancy with the overall results. The only major deviation is that 20 percent of the responding instructors consider the library collection as having little importance in their work. Seventy-eight percent of the SLU faculty view the library collection as very important or indispensable, compared to 80 percent offering those responses in the SIU-C survey.

TABLE 4

"HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU VIEW THE LIBRARIAN AS ASSISTING IN YOUR TEACHING AND RESEARCH?"

College	Indispensable (%age)	Very Important (%age)	Important (%age)	Of Little Importance (%age)	Not Important (%age)
Bus. (N=22)	32	23	27	18	0
Educ. (N=21)	33	43	24	0	0
Hum. (N=58)	31	48	16	5	0
Sci.-Tech. (N=33)	6	33	30	27	3
Rank					
Prof. (N=45)	24	38	24	11	2
Assoc. Prof. (N=45)	29	36	24	11	0
Asst. Prof. (N=31)	29	35	26	10	0
Instr. (N=14)	14	57	14	14	0
All Faculty (N=135)	26	39	24	11	1

TABLE 5

"HAS THE HELP YOU RECEIVED FROM LIBRARIANS AT SIMS LIBRARY BEEN _____"

College	Indispensable (%age)	Very Helpful (%age)	Helpful (%age)	Of Little Help (%age)	Not Helpful (%age)
Bus. (N=21)	19	24	52	5	0
Educ. (N=21)	33	38	24	5	0
Hum. (N=58)	28	45	26	2	0
Sci.-Tech. (N=30)	10	40	37	13	0
Rank					
Prof. (N=44)	23	39	32	7	0
Assoc. Prof. (N=45)	20	40	38	2	0
Asst. Prof. (N=29)	34	24	41	0	0
Instr. (N=13)	15	54	8	8	0
All Faculty (N=131)	23	37	36	5	0

Responses to the next question, "How important do you view the librarians as assisting in your teaching and research," were consistent with the exception of the College of Science and Technology. Whereas approximately 30 percent of the respondents from other colleges view the librarians' assistance as indispensable, only 6 percent of those from Science and Technology offer such an opinion. In overall results, 65 percent of the faculty view the librarians' assistance as being very important or indispensable.

Table 5 presents the results of the responses to a question that is related to the previous one, but with more personal application. The faculty was asked, "Has the help you received from librarians at Sims Library been _____." Sixty percent responded that librarians have been very helpful or indispensable; only 5 percent state that librarians have been of little help. As with the previous question, members of the College of Science and Technology state that help received has been less useful than do respondents from other colleges.

TABLE 6

"HOW MUCH DO YOU FEEL LIBRARIANS CONTRIBUTE TO THE INSTRUCTION OF STUDENTS IN THE UNIVERSITY SETTING?"

College	Very Substantial Amount (%age)	Substantial Amount (%age)	Some (%age)	Very Little (%age)	Nothing (%age)
Bus. (N=21)	10	29	48	14	0
Educ. (N=21)	33	38	24	5	0
Hum. (N=57)	21	49	26	4	0
Sci.-Tech (N=32)	3	50	44	3	0
Rank					
Prof. (N=43)	14	47	33	7	0
Assoc. Prof (N=46)	24	41	35	0	0
Asst. Prof. (N=31)	13	42	39	6	0
Instr. (N=13)	8	46	31	15	0
All Faculty (N=133)	17	44	35	5	0

Table 6 presents the results of responses to the question, "How much do you feel librarians contribute to the instruction of students in the university setting?" The faculties of the Colleges of Education and of Humanities view the contributions of the librarians as more substantial than do the faculties of the Colleges of Business and of Science and Technology. The breakdown of responses by rank shows that more instructors (proportionally) feel that librarians contribute very little to the instruction of the students. According to some comments offered, a number of faculty members believe that librarians should not contribute much to the instruction of students, that such a responsibility belongs solely to the teaching faculty. Bibliographic instruction, however, is handled by members of the library faculty and some librarians have offered to teach courses in various academic disciplines. Perhaps some faculty members should be educated as to the actual and potential extent of librarians' contributions.

A comparison of these responses to those of the faculty in the SIU-C survey points out some differences. For instance, 44 percent of the SLU faculty state that librarians' contributions are substantial, compared to 33 percent of the SIU-C faculty. Also, only 5 percent of the SLU faculty feel that librarians contribute very little, whereas 18 percent of the SIU-C faculty are of the opinion that librarians contribute very little. It must be pointed out that this comparison illustrates differences in the perceptions of the faculties of the two institutions and not necessarily differences in the level or quality of service provided by the libraries.

TABLE 7

"DO YOU FEEL LIBRARIANS SHOULD CONDUCT RESEARCH?"

College	On Practical Topics (%age)	On Scholarly Topics (%age)	Both of Above (%age)	Should Not Conduct Research (%age)	Other (%age)
Bus. (N=20)	55	0	30	5	10
Educ. (N=21)	43	5	33	5	14
Hum. (N=56)	23	2	64	2	9
Sci.-Tech. (N=29)	38	0	41	7	14
Rank					
Prof. (N=42)	37	0	46	0	17
Assoc. Prof. (N=46)	37	2	50	9	2
Asst. Prof. (N=29)	38	0	48	0	14
Instr. (N=12)	17	8	50	0	17
All Faculty (N=129)	35	2	48	4	11

TABLE 8

"HOW MUCH RELEASE TIME SHOULD LIBRARIANS BE GIVEN TO CONDUCT RESEARCH (BASED ON A FORTY-HOUR WORK WEEK)?"

College	0 Percent (%age)	10 Percent (%age)	20 Percent (%age)	30 Percent (%age)	Other (%age)
Bus. (N=17)	29	35	24	6	6
Educ. (N=20)	20	25	20	0	35
Hum. (N=50)	14	28	30	4	24
Sci.-Tech. (N=21)	38	43	10	0	10
Rank					
Prof. (N=34)	32	26	26	0	15
Assoc. Prof. (N=40)	25	38	15	7	15
Asst. Prof. (N=25)	8	28	32	0	28
Instr. (N=10)	10	50	1	0	30
All Faculty (N=107)	22	33	22	3	20

On the question of librarians conducting research, 35 percent of the respondents believe that research should be limited to practical topics related to improving service and collections (see Table 7). Forty-eight percent of the faculty feel that research conducted by librarians should be on both practical and scholarly topics. Those respondents whose answers were placed in the "Other" category feel that the subject of research endeavors should be based on the interests and abilities of the individual. It is apparent from the responses that virtually all of the respondents recognize that research is an item of high priority in the determination of promotion and tenure and so is a fact of life for the faculty member.

In a related question, the faculty members were asked, "How much release time should librarians be given to conduct research (based on a forty-hour work week)?" Twenty-two percent responded that no release time should be given. Some commented that research should be "above and beyond" the other job-related duties of a forty-hour week. Some individuals responded that they are teaching heavy course loads (15 hours per semester or more) and have to conduct research in their "free" time. The responses placed in the "Other" category vary. Some said release time should be 5 percent (2 hours) per week; others stated that release time should be related to grant-funded research.

TABLE 9

"DO YOU VIEW LIBRARIANS AS _____"

College	Faculty (%age)	Professionals (%age)	Nonprofessionals (%age)	Clerical (%age)
Bus. (N=21)	24	71	0	5
Educ. (N=21)	52	48	0	0
Hum. (N=58)	53	47	0	0
Sci-Tech. (N=31)	35	61	0	3
Rank				
Prof. (N=42)	38	62	0	0
Assoc. Prof. (N=44)	39	59	0	2
Asst. Prof. (N=28)	36	61	0	4
Instr. (N=14)	43	57	0	0
All Faculty (N=128)	38	60	0	2

TABLE 10

"SHOULD LIBRARIANS HAVE FACULTY STATUS?"

College	Yes (%age)	No (%age)
Bus. (N=20)	50	50
Educ. (N=20)	70	30
Hum. (N=53)	83	17
Sci.-Tech. (N=26)	62	38
Rank		
Prof. (N=37)	65	35
Assoc. Prof. (N=43)	72	28
Asst. Prof. (N=28)	79	21
Instr. (N=13)	62	38
All Faculty (N=121)	70	30

TABLE 11

"SHOULD THERE BE A LIMIT TO THE RANK LIBRARIANS MAY ATTAIN?"

College	Yes (%age)	No (%age)
Bus. (N=10)	0	100
Educ. (N=14)	21	79
Hum. (N=39)	10	90
Sci.-Tech. (N=15)	7	93
Rank		
Prof. (N=23)	17	83
Assoc. Prof. (N=30)	7	93
Asst. Prof. (N=21)	10	90
Instr. (N=6)	0	100
All Faculty (N=80)	10	90

While a majority of the respondents view librarians as professionals (see Table 9), 70 percent feel that librarians should have faculty status (see Table 10). This figures compares with 57 percent in the SIU-C survey. Of those in favor of faculty status for librarians, 90 percent believe there should be no limit to the rank librarians may attain (as long as university policies regarding promotion are adhered to). Some opposed to faculty status for librarians state that they view the positions as administrative rather than faculty. Others state that, while librarians should not have faculty status, their salaries should be comparable to those of teaching faculty. One respondent proposes equivalent academic rank for libraries (assistant librarian, associate librarian, etc.)

Of those opposed to faculty status for librarians, 74 percent cite insufficient contributions to teaching as the major reason for their response. Others mention insufficient contributions to research and insufficient education as reasons (although four individuals who cite insufficient education state that it would not matter if the librarians earned doctorates).

TABLE 12

"SHOULD LIBRARIANS HAVE 9-MONTH (ACADEMIC YEAR) CONTRACTS?"

College	Yes (%age)	No (%age)
Bus. (N=21)	19	81
Educ. (N=16)	56	44
Hum. (N=46)	61	39
Sci.-Tech. (N=25)	44	56
Rank		
Prof. (N=28)	46	54
Assoc. Prof. (N=41)	49	51
Asst. Prof. (N=27)	41	59
Instr. (N=14)	50	50
All Faculty (N=110)	46	54

Faculty members were also asked, "Should librarians have 9-month (academic year) contracts?" Forty-six percent answered yes and 54 percent answered no. Some respondents equated an academic year plus a summer session with twelve months, though these are not equal. Others stated that the contract year should be determined within the library. (During the 1980-81 year the library faculty did, in fact, request of the university administration an academic year contract with a rotation to be devised for the summer sessions. This request was turned down.)

As mentioned earlier, the frequency of respondent's use of the library does have an apparent effect upon his or her responses to some questions. For example, 51 percent of all faculty state that the library collection is an indispensable part of their teaching and research. Among those who visit the library at least once a week this figure is 67 percent. The percentage of frequent users in favor of faculty status for librarians is 76, as opposed to 64 for less frequent users. On the question of a 9-month contract for librarians only 39 percent of frequent users respond favorably, while 55 percent of less frequent users say yes to this. A reason for this discrepancy may be that frequent users are more likely to seek the assistance of a librarians year-round. There was little or no divergence based on frequency of use in responses to other questions.

This survey instrument is a helpful tool that librarians can use to gauge the perceptions of the teaching faculty. The results of this survey can imply areas in which service can be improved and areas in which relations with the faculty can be bettered. As a comparison

between this survey and that conducted at SIU-C shows, perceptions of the faculty may vary from institution to institution. The librarians at SLU agree with those at SIU-C that replication of this study can be very useful. As M. Kathy Cook states, ". . . comparable studies would lead to a broader knowledge of faculty attitudes towards librarians as members of the faculty."[8]

NOTES

[1] Mary Biggs, "Sources of Tension and Conflict Between Librarians and Faculty," Journal of Higher Education 52: 182-201 (March/April 1981), and Pauline Wilson, "Librarians as Teachers: The Study of an Organization Fiction," Library Quarterly 49: 146-62 (April 1979).

[2] Nancy Davey and Theodore Andrews, "Implications of Faculty Status for Librarians, with Special Attention to Tenure," Journal of Academic Librarianship 4: 71-74 (May 1978).

[3] Daniel Gore, "Faculty Status for the Librarians at Arbuthnot," American Libraries 2: 293-95 (March 1971).

[4] Biggs, Sources of Tension," p. 197.

[5] "Joint Statement on Faculty Status of College and University Librarians," AAUP Bulletin 59: 266-67 (Summer 1973).

[6] Louisiana Revised Statutes, 17: 3304.

[7] M. Kathy Cook, "Rank, Status, and Contribution of Academic Librarians as Perceived by the Teaching Faculty at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale," College and Research Libraries 42: 214-23 (May 1981).

[8] Ibid., p. 221.

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